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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN ENVIRONMENT UPDATE

November 11, 2005

1. Summary: This information is drawn primarily from the Kazakhstani press, and has not been verified. The opinions expressed in this report, therefore, should not be interpreted by readers as conveying positions and/or policy of the U.S. Government.

-- Kazakhstan and China to Increase Cooperation on Transboundary Rivers
-- Experts Discuss Joint Management of Water Resources
-- Kazakhstan's Water Supply in Danger
-- Aral Sea Conservation
-- Interstate Coordination Water Commission (ICWC) Meet in Almaty
-- Karaozek River Hydro Structure to Relieve Flooding in Kyzylorda Oblast
-- UNGA Adopts Resolution on Rehabilitation and Development of Semipalatinsk
-- President Nazarbayev Promises Payment to Semipalatinsk Sufferers
-- Hospital Department for Children from Environmentally Unfavorable Regions Opened
-- Concern over Atyrau Oblast Reservoirs
-- Pipeline Leak in Ust-Kamenogorsk

Kazakhstan-China Cooperation on Transboundary Rivers

2. (U) On October 23, the Kazakhstani-Chinese Joint Commission on the Use and Protection of Transboundary Rivers met for the third time in Shanghai and approved a reporting procedure in the event of emergency floods and ice phenomena. The Commission also discussed drafts of three intergovernmental agreements proposed by the Kazakhstani side: mutual exchange of hydrological and hydrochemical information on transboundary river basins, joint scientific-research activity, and water quality and water pollution control. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, October 31, 2005)

Experts Discuss Joint Management of Water Resources

3. (U) Central Asian specialists met in Almaty on October 31 to develop a unified regional position on joint management of water resources to present at the 4th World Water Forum in March 2006 in Mexico. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, October 31, 2005)

Kazakhstan's Water Supply in Danger

4. (U) According to water experts, in the near future Kazakhstan will have serious problems with water supply. Over 40% of Kazakhstan's water supply originates outside of its borders and water resources are not evenly distributed throughout the country. Atyrau, Kyzylorda, and Mangystau Oblasts lack fresh water sources. Working with neighboring countries on the joint use and protection of transboundary rivers will be an important issue for the government. (Kazinform, October 21, 2005)

Aral Sea Conservation

5. (U) Kazakhstan is preparing for the second phase of the "Regulation of the Syr Darya River Bed and Conservation of the Aral Sea Project." The second phase of the project will focus on construction and rehabilitation of protective dams and drainage systems to prevent flooding and erosion. Other measures are also being planned. The cost of the project, including the second phase, is estimated at \$120 million. (AIF, No 44, November 2005)

Interstate Coordination Water Commission (ICWC) Meets

6. (U) On November 2, the 42nd regular meeting of ICWC was held in Almaty. Meeting participants reviewed the water intake limits and operational mode of reservoir cascades from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river basins for the vegetation period of 2005, and approved water intake limits for the 2005-2006 non-vegetation period. The meeting participants pointed out that during the vegetation period

of 2005 there were violations of water intake limits at some gullies, instances of erratic water supply, and cases of water fluctuations in some hydro electric station pools. To address these shortcomings, the Commission decided to establish a working commission to analyze water supply violations and their causes and make proposals on the prevent of such occurrences in the future. (Received from USAID, November 10, 2005)

Efforts to Relieve Flooding in Kyzylorda Oblast

17. (U) Deputy Prime Minister Akhmetzhan Esimov visited the construction site of the Karaozek River hydro structure in Kyzylorda Oblast. Work on the hydro structure began last spring at an estimated cost of 400 million Tenge. When completed, the hydro structure will direct flood waters to natural reservoirs in the Syr Darya river basin and alleviate flooding of nearby populated areas, Esimov said. (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, November 8, 2005)

UNGA Resolution on Semipalatinsk

18. (U) On November 1, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a Kazakhstani resolution on ecological rehabilitation and development of the Semipalatinsk region. The resolution stressed the need to provide advanced expertise to reduce and suppress radiological, socioeconomic, health, and environmental problems. The United States and 78 other countries co-sponsored the resolution. (Interfax-Kazakhstan, November 4, 2005; Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, November 5, 2005)

Nazarbayev Promises Payment to Semipalatinsk Sufferers

19. (U) President Nursultan Nazarbayev said in his speech at the 21st Extraordinary Congress of Kazakhstan's Federation of Trade Unions in Astana that the payment of compensation to those who have suffered from the Semipalatinsk nuclear test range will start in 2007. Nearly 500 nuclear tests were carried out from 1949 to 1989 at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test range. In line with a decree by the President, the test range was closed in 1991. (BBC Monitoring Central Asia, October 31, 2005)

Hospital Department for Children from Environmentally Unfavorable Regions Opened

10. (U) Kyzylorda Oblast opened Kazakhstan's first hospital department for children with diseases related to environmental damage. Kyzylorda is one of Kazakhstan's most environmentally polluted areas. (Rakhat, October 26, 2005)

Concern over Atyrau Oblast Reservoirs

11. (U) Ecologists in Atyrau Oblast are concerned about the state of the reservoirs in the region. The ecologists contend that expansion in the number of steamers combined with intensive offshore oil and gas extraction is polluting the Yaik River. The government, however, disagrees with the ecologists. A governmental commission, which annually examines the environmental conditions in the region, stated that there is no environmental threat to the reservoirs. (Kazakhstan1, October 24-25, 2005)

Pipeline Leak in Ust-Kamenogorsk

12. (U) A leak was discovered in a sewage and industrial waste pipeline that lies on the bottom of the Irtysh River. The pipeline was repaired, but the extent of environmental contamination was unknown. A laboratory report on the level of contamination was to be submitted in a week. (Eurasia, KTK, October 27, 2005)

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